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SUBJECT: Guangzhou Police Raid Underground Church, Seek
Connection to Eastern Lightning Sect's Growth in South
China

(U) CLASSIFIED BY CONSUL GENERAL ROBERT GOLDBERG FOR
REASONS: 1.4 (b) AND (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: According to a leader of the local Li Jiang Fellowship church, the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau (PSB) raided her underground church on April 22. PSB officials disrupted the gathering of 100 churchgoers gathering in a local restaurant and warned church leaders to cease holding "unregistered" meetings. According to the church leader, Ms. Ruth Han (protect), Chinese authorities were particularly interested in any ties the church might have to the Heilongjiang and Henan province-based religious group Eastern Lightning. Members of the Protestant missionary and local church community in Guangzhou are concerned that any connection with this aggressively-proselytizing sect may result in heavier PSB and RAB crackdowns on their activities. END SUMMARY.

Background

¶2. (C) Li Jiang Fellowship is an unregistered Protestant, non-denominational fellowship of approximately 200 regular attendees that meets near a large, modern housing complex in Guangzhou. The church is led by an American, Pastor Eugene, who told Congenoff in May 2006 that the fellowship attracted a Mandarin-speaking congregation of professionals working in the legal, marketing, multinational, and education sectors of Guangzhou. The pastor's sermons are in English; several Chinese teachers in the congregation act as translators. The fellowship's leadership consists of several American missionaries and Chinese professionals who help manage day-to-day church activities. The fellowship's ministries include relationship counseling; English language instruction; supporting a local, unregistered, Christian K-12 school (a responsibility shared by several churches in the neighborhood); and parenting. Since the raid in December 2006, Ms. Han says, the church has been meeting in a local restaurant under the guise of having dim sum breakfast.

¶3. (C) Services and group meetings held by the fellowship are routinely shut down by Chinese authorities so much so that Ms. Han says the church is "used to it." In 2006 the fellowship was raided by authorities 3 separate times, twice by the local PSB, and once by a joint PSB/RAB task force. In each case, members were questioned and upbraided for holding an unregistered meeting; the owner of the meeting premises was warned that there would be consequences. The December 2006 PSB/RAB raid was more thorough, according to Ms. Han, and church members were questioned for over an hour concerning their ties to foreign missionaries and the Eastern Lightning sect. No church members were ever formally arrested or charged, and Ms. Han reported that church members suffered no physical

mistreatment by Chinese authorities. Typically, after each raid, church members split off into smaller group meetings in individual residences, "laying low" while leaders search for a new location.

Two Raids: December 2006 and April 22, 2007

14. (C) According to Ms. Han, during Sunday services on April 22, approximately 10 uniformed PSB officers entered the restaurant unannounced and, shouting from outside of the dining room, ordered church members to cease their activities. The congregants, guided by church leaders, quietly continued their service, while church "spotters" who were on guard outside the dining room were thoroughly questioned. Ms. Han noted that the April raid was less thorough going than the raid in December 2006, when plainclothes RAB officials grilled church members on whether they had any connection to Eastern Lightning activities in Guangzhou. It appears that Guangzhou PSB and RAB interest in Eastern Lightning and other aggressively proselytizing groups has grown significantly over the last two years, as Eastern Lightning's regional presence has expanded.

Eastern Lightning's Rapid Growth

15. (C) Alfred Leong (strictly protect), the Chairman of the Guangzhou International Christian Fellowship (GICF), a foreigners-only, registered organization, explained to Congenoff that the Chinese authorities are not the only ones concerned about Eastern Lightning. Missionaries and

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local Chinese church leaders alike are concerned about the sect's aggressive and oftentimes coercive recruitment tactics. Mr. Leong noted that Eastern Lightning, despite maintaining bases of power in Heilongjiang and Henan provinces, had gradually spread southward, starting its outreach in Guangzhou as early as five years ago. According to Mr. Leong, Eastern Lightning's primary method of recruitment is to send members, posing as new churchgoers, to various fellowships; after a period of profiling "newer" Christians, the recruiters befriend their targets and eventually persuade or coerce them to leave their existing church communities.

16. (C) Other Guangzhou Christians have expressed deep concern about this dual danger, i.e., of continued PSB harassment on the one hand, and the threat of their fellowships being infiltrated by Eastern Lightning on the other. In discussions on April 27, two of the Consulate's churchgoing Locally Engaged Staff (LES) indicated that Eastern Lightning's recruiters have even targeted Guangzhou's officially sanctioned Three Self churches. They noted that the Three Self church on Shamian Island, located across the street from the Consulate's main offices, had been unsuccessfully targeted by the sect's recruiters in 2005. The LES suggested that an environment of closer government scrutiny and supervision in Three Self churches makes it harder for Eastern Lightning to operate; thus, unregistered house churches (such as Samuel Lam's "De Zheng Road" house church, one of the largest in Guangzhou) are considered the best recruiting ground. According to the LES, while RAB keeps a close watch on religious activities, Guangzhou PSB officials still do not have a clear understanding of the differences between the house churches, denominations, and offshoot sects gaining ground in Guangzhou. They are worried that their churches may be linked to Eastern Lightning by association. Ms. Han said that many of the "mainstream" underground Protestant fellowships across Guangzhou have the same concerns, resulting in a climate of increased fear and suspicion

towards new church members.

17. (C) COMMENT: Discussions with Ms. Han, Consulate LES, the foreign missionary community, and Guangzhou church members indicate that they do not regard routine PSB raids as particularly threatening. They note that many PSB officers are actually church members, and that the raids appear to be more of a warning, reminding churches that they are being watched. An informal poll of members of four different churches indicates that, despite PSB raids, no church members were actually detained in 2006. Rather, infiltration and association with sects like Eastern Lightning is the more pressing concern. Church members have read press reports and heard extensive rumors about death sentences handed out to sect members in Northeastern China, and are deeply concerned about being associated with "radical" sects. END COMMENT.

18. (U) NOTE: The New York Times published an article concerning recruitment wars between Eastern Lightning and another sect, Three Grades of Servants. The article, "China Executes Leader of Christian Sect," was published on 11/29/2006 and contains additional information about the two religious groups and a recent police campaign to crack down on them.

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